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PROBLEMS OF MILITARY TRANSPORTATION

BY MAJOR-GENERAL WILLIAM HARDING CARTER, U. S. A.

WE have stood at the threshold of war for nearly three years without the nation itself having formulated any very definite ideas as to what course we would pursue in event of being drawn into the maelstrom in Europe. This neglect is quite pardonable when viewed in the light of our past history, because up to the present period no American authority ever contemplated for a moment any conditions of world war which would draw our troops to the field of battle in Europe. Our course for three-quarters of a century has been to attend quite strictly to our own affairs, relying upon the Monroe doctrine to protect us from foreign aggression on this continent and upon our common sense, good will and righteous intention to save us from war upon any other continent.

The American forces now being prepared for service in France comprise the regular army, the national guard of the States, and the drafted men who are to compose the new national army. The mobilization and movement of all these forces to their stations for training before embarkation to the theatre of war in France constitutes a remarkable tribute to the efficiency of our railway systems, which have never been run as parts of the military organization, as is the practice in Europe. It is a matter of grave doubt whether Government-owned railroads on this continent would have solved the problems of transportation any better, if as well, as has been done by the corporations themselves.

Previous to the declaration of war with Germany, and its announcement by the President, Congress had decided that the regular army was not large enough to carry on its duties in time of peace, including the operations which, for

the last five or six years, have demanded so large a force along the Mexican border, and authorized a considerable increase of the army to be added in five annual increments. Only one of these had been added when war was declared. The entire increase was then ordered at once. This reorganization of the army, with all its attendant breaking-up of old organizations and creation of new regiments from skeleton battalions, has had to go on at the same time that the national guard was being mobilized in camps in the several States.

The provisions for the calling out of the drafted army necessarily took some time. Meanwhile the movement to assemble the regulars and national guard in convenient organizations for the preliminary training for foreign service was begun. The transportation of these troops from their home stations to the division camps and the transportation of the drafted men to their cantonments, at some of which as many as 40,000 men are to be quartered, required different treatment from anything within the recent experience of our railroads in the matter of troop transportation.

It had been recognized early in the summer, after war was declared, that some more definite and centralized control of railroad systems would be necessary if the troops and supplies essential to war on the part of ourselves and the Allies were to be transported without interruption to their several destinations. In this emergency the railroad organizations were called into conference and there was established at Washington a committee with a highly trained presiding officer to control and direct all the operations of the railroads in so far as necessary to insure a free movement of troops and supplies without congestion in any part of the great systems.

It is a matter of history that five days after the declaration of war against Germany the presidents of the American railroads met at the national capitol and agreed that during the war they would subordinate every other interest to help win the war; that they would eliminate all competitive rivalry and merge their interests under the direction of the American Railway Association's special committee on national defense.

Since that date the operation of all the railroads of the country has been under the direct jurisdiction of an executive committee of five, located at Washington. . Under that

committee is a general committee in charge of the details. For the purpose of coöperating with the War Department, its territorial or department divisions of the United States were adopted by the railroads and a committee of railway officials was appointed for each department.

To every army department headquarters was assigned an expert in railway operation, with a corps of assistants placed at railroad centers, on whom rests the responsibility for the movement by rail of troops, munitions and supplies as desired by the military authorities. The experience and efficiency of this railway official, with the authority over all roads vested in him, proved of inestimable value to the War Department.

Various periods were set aside for the use of the railroads with a view to as little interference as possible with the regular passenger and freight traffic. The movement of drafted men of the new national army involved more men, but the movement of the widely scattered national guard was a much more difficult problem for the railroads. The War Department had determined that during the movement of the drafted men of the national army there should be no movement of the national guard. Among the periods allotted for the use of the railroads that between September 24 and October 1 was designated as available for the movement of national guard organizations of the Central Department. The carrying out of this movement affords an illustration of what can be done when all are working to a common, patriotic purpose.

To prevent congestion at the concentration camps or on the railroads it was necessary to perfect a plan covering every detail. This plan showed the location of every national guard unit, the exact time for its entrainment, the railway route to be used, the speed schedule to be followed, and the time of arrival at destination. From five to twelve days in advance of the movement of the national guard every railroad participating in it knew exactly what service it would have to perform. The movement was started on the evening of September 24 and completed on October 1. The railway equipment required 750 sleeping cars, 1,500 coaches and baggage cars, not including freight cars.

How well the plans were made is shown by the fact that the movement was carried out in such a manner that there was not more than one regiment on any one railroad on

any one day, and that not more than one regiment arrived at any camp on the same day. During this period eighty-two organizations, in fourteen States, were moved to their new stations. The transportation involved 2,571 officers, 83,751 enlisted men, with baggage, tents, wagons and animals.

Without an accident to a single man, without delay at point of origin, en route, or at destination, without a hitch in the arrangements as originally planned, the officers and men of the national guard scattered in fourteen States were transported by rail in one week to the distant cantonments designated by the War Department. That is a record of which every American has a right to be proud. It is more remarkable in view of the fact that it was made at a time when the railways were handling the heaviest commercial traffic, both freight and passenger, ever known. Just two things made that record possible—organization and coöperation; the organization of our army, the organization of our entire transportation lines into practically a single system; and the hearty coöperation of these two highly developed organizations.

The whole movement of the national guard in the very short time allotted, without causing congestion on the railroads or at the camp destinations, could not have been effected but for the unification of the railroads agreed upon by their presidents and carried out through what is commonly called the railroads' war board. The railway equipment necessary was provided regardless of ownership. Many railroads which were required to furnish cars for the movement did not haul any of the troops. That is practical patriotism which the country should appreciate.

While the preference would have been given by the railroads to this military traffic in any event, the fact that it was not necessary to change the regularly scheduled passenger trains proves that the interests of the traveling public were also carefully considered when the plans were made for the national guard movement. The facts most clearly demonstrated are the advantages to the Government of close coöperation between the military authorities and the railroads, and that heavy military movements can be made without drawing on the resources of the railroads to an extent that interferes to an appreciable degree with regular commercial traffic.

Among the things which must not be discussed now are the embarkation and sailing for foreign ports of the army which is to bear our flag on the European battle fields, nor is it deemed appropriate to announce the routes or movements of organizations on their way to mobilization camps or ports of embarkation.

When the war with Spain began we were entirely without any deep sea transportation service, nor had we had any experience to indicate to us what course we should pursue in creating one. Our subsequent experience was remarkable indeed when we consider the very small losses sustained during nearly twenty years' operation of the army transport service. When one searches the register of commercial ships and observes the number lost at sea during the period of nearly twenty years that the army has been operating its deep sea transportation we must come to the conclusion that our freedom from accident and loss arises not from mere good fortune but from careful preparation and the maintenance of very high standards upon all our Government vessels.

The number of soldiers conveyed back and forth across the wide expanse of the Pacific Ocean, long since passed above the million mark, practically without loss, constitutes one of the most remarkable stories of military experience. Not only have the troops been conveyed in perfect safety but thousands upon thousands of public animals have also been carried on our ships, and all in such comfort that they have generally been deemed ready for immediate service upon disembarkation on the opposite side of the world. We are now confronted with the necessity for transporting even larger numbers than has been heretofore within our experience to the scene of warfare in Europe.

The small fleet of army transports will cut an insignificant figure in this movement, but we shall base all our operations in that line on the splendid experience which has come to us since the war with Spain and the occupation of the distant Philippine Islands. That the problems to be encountered in this great movement will be met by the army in the same manner in which it has met and solved so many other problems may be accepted as certain in the light of our past history.

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